

HAWAIIAN SPINNER DOLPHIN

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Did you know...

...the spinner dolphin is named for its magnificent midair spins.

...spinner dolphins feed at night, and rest during the daytime.



Photo courtesy Lori Mazzuca ©1997

Distribution & Movement Patterns

Unlike oceanic spinner dolphins, Hawaiian spinners are found close to shore in shallow coves and bays during the day. In these important nearshore habitats, Hawaiian spinner dolphins rest, care for their young, avoid predators and engage in reproductive activities vital to their survival.

Feeding patterns

Hawai'i's spinner dolphins feed at night in the open ocean, usually along and across the slope in the 100 to 1,000 fathom escarpment. They feed on organisms that rise toward the surface at night, such as small squid, lantern fish, and small hake.

Dolphins have a reputation for being friendly and playful... but they are wild animals who should be treated with caution and respect.

Wild dolphins are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Under this Act, it is illegal to harass, hunt, capture, kill, feed or attempt any of these activities.

Report any suspected violations to the NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964.

We encourage you to observe dolphins in the wild from at least 50 yards.

Natural History

Females reach sexual maturity at 5-12 years of age.

Gestation period is 10-12 months.

Normally, adult females can give birth to a single calf every second or third year.

Calves are weaned at 7 months of age or more.

Although the maximum age is unknown, the spinner dolphin's lifespan is believed to be over 20 years.

Exact population numbers are not known.

Threats

Acoustic disturbance from vessels

Collisions with ships

Entanglement in marine debris

Habitat degradation

Human disturbance...though not apparent to the casual observer, spinner dolphins may be disturbed by close approaches by vessels and swimmers.

Research

Documenting social behavior, vocalizations and population structure

Documenting the impacts of human interaction on spinners

Other dolphins and small whales commonly seen in Hawai'i include: Bottlenose dolphins, spotted dolphins, false killer whales, pilot whales and Risso's dolphins.

For more information... Call NOAA Fisheries Protected Species Management Program at (808) 973-2987, or the Sanctuary headquarters below. For viewing marine mammals in the wild, visit the NOAA Fisheries website:

www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/MMWatch/MMViewing.html

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